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# Cultures and spaces of convenience gambling

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## Abstract

**Background:** In many countries, the bulk of gambling takes place in convenience spaces in relatively confined, local markets. Nevertheless, research on gambling locations has so far concentrated on destination gambling in casinos. **Aim:** This article studies convenience gambling and distinguishes special (e.g., gambling arcades) from everyday convenience gambling spaces (e.g., electronic gambling machines in supermarkets). Rather than geographically or functionally analysing the harm potential of convenience gambling, we approach the issue through cultural theory. **Method:** We conducted reception analytical group interviews with Finnish and French gamblers. This method is based on focus-group discussions stimulated by six short film clips. Our data consisted of 14 Finnish and 14 French groups, altogether 110 participants. The interviews were analysed thematically on the basis of the types of discourses the participants evoked. **Results:** The Finnish respondents discussed how their gambling culture was embedded in their everyday lives. They saw it as a harmless pastime if the sums used were small and otherwise unbudgeted. The French informants instead strongly connected gambling with the casino and were suspicious of the easy, cheap availability of convenience gambling. They also differentiated between exceptional and mundane spaces of convenience gambling, which the interviewed Finnish gamblers did not. **Conclusions:** Social or cultural availability is not only a matter of access; it also influences gamblers after they have entered the gambling venue. Structural characteristics interact with the gambler and the setting, but they are also mediated by the cultural context.

## Keywords

culture, Finland, focus group, France, gambling

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The availability of gambling options, particularly widely accessible electronic gambling machines (EGMs), in convenience locations sparked debate in the Finnish media in late 2017 (e.g., HS, 25.10, 2017; HS, 28.10, 2017; HS, 3.11, 2017). The discussion culminated in a suggested revision of the Finnish gambling law, introducing mandatory identification of all players (HS, 19.12, 2017), as well as in a proposition to ban EGMs in supermarkets and other easily accessible convenience locations, and to move them to gambling arcades (HS, 29.11, 2017). Both suggestions as possible means of reducing gambling-related harm find support in the available research literature (e.g., Sulkunen et al., 2018), but the focus of this article is on the latter. In many countries, the bulk of gambling takes place in convenience spaces in relatively confined, local markets. In the same vein as the current public discussion in Finland, some studies have suggested replacing convenience opportunities with destination gambling as a possible harm-minimisation strategy (Productivity Commission, 2010; Young, Tyler, & Lee, 2007).

We distinguish between two main types of convenience gambling spaces: special convenience locations, which include clubs and arcades; and everyday convenience locations such as petrol stations and supermarket foyers. The current Finnish convenience gambling landscape is heavily characterised by the latter. The Finnish gambling monopoly, Veikkaus, offers both EGM- and lottery-type games in a variety of everyday locations, ranging from supermarkets and kiosks to transportation hubs. Special convenience locations in Finland consist of so-called *Pelaamo* (formerly called *Täyspotti*) and *Feel Vegas* gambling arcades, which offer mainly EGMs, but also betting and lottery games. In addition, *Feel Vegas* arcades also offer casino table games such as roulette and blackjack. In order to highlight the specificities of the Finnish system, this study compares it to that of France. French convenience gambling differs in the kind of spaces and games that are on offer. In France, convenience

gambling mainly occurs in special locations, represented by a tight network of so-called PMU (*Pari mutuel urbain*) bars (over 12,000 bars in mainland France). Although these bars do not offer EGM gambling, they have other immersive games such as the *Amigo* instant lottery and horse race betting. Lottery games are provided in PMU bars, but these are also available in more ordinary outlets, mainly tobacco and press shops (25,000 tobacco shops in mainland France). This article asks whether differences between everyday and special convenience locations encourage different types of cultural positions in terms of gambling.

Previous studies have shown that problem gambling is conceptualised differently across cultural contexts (Neal, Delfabbro, & O'Neil, 2005; Pöysti & Majamäki, 2013) and that different cultural settings may encourage different types of gambling harm (e.g., Sobrun-Maharaj, Rossen, & Shiu-Kai-Wong, 2012; Williams, Volberg, & Stevens, 2012; see also Lorains, Cowlshaw, & Thomas, 2011), but until now, research has not focused on the harm potential of the different spaces of convenience gambling from the perspective of these positions. Therefore, rather than analysing these opportunities and spaces geographically or functionally, we approach them in terms of cultural theory. Alcohol studies have a long tradition of taking a cultural perspective and comparing drinking cultures (see Room & Mäkelä, 2000). Following these insights, we can differentiate between the positions of societies in regard to alcohol, based on how present alcoholic beverages are in everyday life and how drunkenness is governed. Informed by these findings, this study develops a similar framework for gambling, with the help of an analysis of focus-group interviews.

We first introduce the previous literature on the spaces and types of convenience gambling. Then we discuss these different forms from a cultural perspective, using social theory in terms of societal views on such consumption. Finally, we focus on the different forms of

convenience gambling in Finland and France and how gamblers experience them, based on group interview data collected from among recreational gamblers in the two countries. We conclude by discussing the cultural framework for gambling studies as well as the policy implications of this study.

## **Spaces and types of convenience gambling**

Opportunities for gambling are provided in a variety of different spaces and forms. Griffiths (e.g., Griffiths, 1993; Griffiths & Parke, 2003) distinguished between situational characteristics such as availability, which bring potential gamblers into the gambling environment, and the structural characteristics inherent in gambling, which induce gamblers to continue playing. Differentiating between the different types of spaces and types of gambling also helps shift the focus from the player to the product, or even more importantly, their interaction. This interaction is formed in an interplay between the individual proclivity to gamble, available gambling opportunities, and the enablement of gambling venues (Productivity Commission, 2010; Quinn, 2001).

Different game and venue characteristics may encourage or discourage excessive play. The previous literature has distinguished types of games according to their problem potential (Griffiths & Wood, 2001; Sulkunen et al., 2018; Valleur, 2008). Griffiths and Wood (2001) have distinguished between soft and hard forms of gambling. Soft forms include weekly lotteries and football pools, while hard forms include casino games, EGMs, horse and greyhound race betting, as well as instant scratch cards and online equivalents of these games. Research evidence supports this distinction, particularly regarding EGMs. According to population studies, although only 36% of all Finnish respondents played EGMs, the share was 87% among those who were classified as problem gamblers (South Oaks Gambling Screen (SOGS) 3+) (Turja, Halme, Mervola, Järvinen-Tassopoulos,

& Ronkainen, 2012). These figures are similar to those in other Western countries, in which EGM gambling has been associated with the highest rates of gambling problems (see Dowling, Smith, & Trang, 2005; Sulkunen et al., 2018; Vasiliadis, Jackson, Christensen, & Francis, 2013). Studies have also shown that EGM gamblers progress to problem gambling faster than players of other games (Breen & Zimmerman, 2002), and that each additional EGM is associated with approximately 0.8 additional problem gamblers in a community (Storer, Abbott, & Stubbs, 2009).

Different gambling spaces have been distinguished, particularly regarding varying casino designs and environments (e.g., Eadington, 1998; Finlay, Marmurek, Kanetkar, & Londerville, 2007, 2010; Thompson, 2010), but convenience gambling has been defined by separating it from destination gambling. Whereas casino destination venues are characterised by tourism and higher economic returns, convenience gambling is defined by higher accessibility, spatial dispersion and marketing aimed at local players (e.g., Chhabra, 2008; Eadington, 1998; Goodman, 1995).

Less attention has been paid to differences between convenience gambling spaces, and evidence regarding their impact on gambling behaviour is slim. The few typologies that have been created focus on different types of EGM venues (Posey, 1998; Young, Markham, & Doran, 2012). Posey (1998) classified VLT (Video Lottery Terminal, a type of EGM) venues in South Carolina on the basis of whether they were dedicated to gambling, for example, arcades; entertainment establishments that also offered gambling, such as cinemas or bowling alleys; or non-entertainment establishments that also offered gambling, such as supermarkets. This distinction coincides with that made in the current article between special and everyday spaces of convenience gambling. In Australia, Young et al. (2012) distinguished between different types of gambling clubs and pubs on the basis of size and location. Their study found that central and larger venues were

connected to more harm than peripheral and smaller venues.

The high accessibility and density of convenience gambling opportunities has been connected to elevated rates of problem gambling and other gambling-related harm as well as increased expenditure on gambling (Sulkunen et al., 2018; Vasiliadis et al., 2013; Young et al., 2012). Policy experiences from jurisdictions such as Norway, many Eastern European countries, Nova Scotia, and Australia have further shown that restricting the availability of convenience EGMs can have an impact on gambling participation rates and result in reduced gambling problems, but the caps need to be significant or the accessibility of these opportunities must change substantially (see Vasiliadis et al., 2013 and Sulkunen et al., 2018 for reviews). Hence, if gambling opportunities remain widely available despite being confined to special convenience locations, they can nevertheless cause significant problems (e.g., Productivity Commission, 2010; Young, 2010). This review of the previous literature suggests that moving Finnish EGMs from everyday locations to special convenience spaces would have to be accompanied by significant reductions in machine numbers to have an impact on gambling harm. Furthermore, we suggest that any change needs to be accompanied by a shift in cultural positions.

## **A cultural perspective on gambling**

Cultural images of gambling can be defined as collective dispositions (Gronow, 2011) or a “blueprint” of how to gamble and what kind of gambling is considered proper and right. Learning takes place in a certain time, environment and context (e.g., Matilainen & Raento, 2014; Reith & Dobbie, 2011) and involves rules and game mechanisms, but also knowledge regarding how to interact with other gamblers or personnel, and how to perform when winning or losing (e.g., Oldman, 1974; Reichertz, Niederbacher, Möll, Gothe, & Hitzler, 2010).

Learning how to experience this “intoxication” and how to handle the risks of the behaviour corresponds to what Becker (1953) and Zinberg (1984) identified years ago as important skills in drug use. Gambling images are also infused with cultural “deep structures” (Sulkunen, 2013), such as individualism and collectivism (Majamäki & Pöysti, 2012), trust (Pöysti, 2014), values and beliefs (Raylu & Oei, 2004), myths (Falk & Mäenpää, 1999), gender roles (Casey, 2008) or masculinity (Egerer & Rantala, 2015). Furthermore, game preference seems to be culture specific (e.g., Schüll, 2013), although more evidence is available from alcohol studies in which cultures have been grouped according to the prominent beverage type (e.g., Sulkunen, 1976).

Alcohol studies have a more established tradition of cultural approaches than the gambling field, and while these theories are not directly transposable in gambling studies, they can offer important insights. Several dimensions have been identified to distinguish between different drinking cultures, including drinking frequency, the type of drinker, the drinking occasion, the social controls of drinking and drunkenness, (acceptable) behaviour when drunk, and the extent of intoxication (Room & Mäkelä, 2000).

Intoxication, as it refers to a “toxin” that physically impacts the body (Rantala & Sulkunen, 2012), seems to be a misleading concept in gambling studies. Gambling scholars have instead discussed a similar altered state of consciousness as “being in the zone” (e.g., Schüll, 2012; Woolley & Livingstone, 2010) or a flow experience (Palomäki & Laakasuo, 2016). However, the negative connotation of “the zone” and the inapplicability of the flow experience to games of pure chance render both concepts limited. Furthermore, although altered states of consciousness may have been the topic in the psy-sciences for some time, this naturally downplays the factors beyond the individual’s consciousness (see, e.g., Ludwig, 1966). In anthropology, exceptions from everyday life are often connected to a liminality in the social

texture (e.g., Thomasson, 2009; van Gennepe, 1960). Näre and Lähtenmaa (2017) suggested that gambling mirrors the increased, persistent liminality in postmodern capitalist societies. Nowadays, national gambling legislations assign different spaces to different types of games. In the 21st century, gambling has become a profane activity (Reith, 1999) and the opportunity to gamble in convenience places indeed points in this direction. Therefore, in this article we suggest a concept that enables us to understand the exceptional state of being in a social sense rather than as a question of individual consciousness, but still includes profane spaces and everyday encounters: the German expression “*Rausch*” describes a deep immersion in gambling. A gambling *rausch* involves individuals’ altered states of consciousness, but also how this condition is managed in the social dimension. Establishing such a concept does not only allow us to focus on the social setting of gambling; it also has the advantage of including non-substance- (“non-toxin”) induced experiences as well as group experiences, which would be hard to grasp using existing concepts such as “the zone”. The gambling *rausch* does not preclude the nature of possible consequences, nor does it value the experience as positive or negative (e.g., Korte, 2007).

## Methods and data

In order to study the different cultural positions in regard to convenience gambling, we conducted reception analytical group interviews (RAGI) with Finnish and French gamblers during 2009 and 2010. We chose to conduct group interviews, as social interaction highlights consensus-making while discouraging individual bias. This also optimises data for the study of the collective understandings of a specific social or cultural group (see, e.g., Egerer, 2014 or Rolando, 2015). The RAGI method was originally designed to encourage precisely such social interpretations of reality by using stimuli to inspire interaction between participants and

their cultural environment. In comparison to other group interview designs, which may or may not be structured, the RAGI always uses a structured protocol of tested and carefully chosen stimuli (Sulkunen & Egerer, 2009; Törrönen, 2002). These stimuli (usually film clips), serve a similar function to that of questions in a questionnaire (Egerer, 2014), but they leave more room for interpretation – this is a strength as well as a limitation of this method (Karekallas & Raento, 2014).

In our interviews, we used six film clips to help interviewees share their interpretations of similar situations in their own social reality (Marionneau, 2015). These clips (see the filmography list at the end of the article) were chosen to depict various gambling situations and types of gambling, and ensure that the discussions would touch on a variety of topics. Six orienting questions<sup>1</sup> dealing with the immediate description of the film clips were distributed to help get the discussions started, but we emphasized that we did not require the participants to answer these questions, but to discuss the clips and share their own experiences of gambling more broadly. We also provided subtitles and a brief synopsis of the scenes to ensure comprehensibility. The film clips were shown in three series of two clips. After each series, the participants discussed them for approximately 15 to 20 minutes, making the total duration of the discussions 60 to 80 minutes. This protocol was applied in the same manner to the groups in Finland and France.

The participants were recruited from different gambling venues to ensure that the samples contained players of a variety of different games. In Finland, the recruitment took place at gambling arcades, websites specialised in gambling, and supermarket notice boards near EGMs. The French participants were recruited from gambling arcades and through the researcher’s contacts. In both countries, we also used snowballing to recruit more participants. Non-gamblers and self-identified problem gamblers were excluded from participating, though we did not conduct a screening for gambling

**Table 1.** Participants in Finland and France.

	Total	Finland	France
Participants	110	48	62
Male	56	33	23
participants			
Female	54	15	39
participants			
Average age (total)	36.6 years	35.7 years	37.4 years
Average age (male)	34.6 years	33.7 years	35.8 years
Average age (female)	38.8 years	40.0 years	38.3 years

problems. Thus all participants must be considered as self-identified recreational gamblers.

The final data consisted of 14 Finnish and 14 French groups, with 110 participants altogether (see Table 1). The participants were recruited from the Paris and Helsinki urban areas. They gave verbal informed consent. Although the data are already a few years old, the interviews are still illustrative of the current situation in convenience gambling. Little has changed in either country regarding the availability of offline convenience gambling. As online gambling was not yet widely popular during the time of the interviews, the discussions revolved more strongly around accessible offline opportunities.

The interviews were transcribed and coded in the original language using qualitative data analysis software Atlas.ti. As with any qualitative and cultural study, researcher input and interpretation were significant in the data analysis process. This subjectivity was trialled by two different researchers independently coding the transcripts.

We analysed the data thematically on the basis of the dimensions of the cultural position towards gambling. We departed from the dimensions suggested by Room and Mäkelä (2000) in alcohol studies, using them as what Strauss (1987) called “sociologically constructed” codes. After the first round of coding we expanded beyond these categories and during an iterative process, we found the

dimensions that best described convenience gambling. Finally, we focused our analysis on three main topics of convenience gambling in Finland and France: embeddedness in everyday life, types of convenience locations, and the acceptability of the gambling *rausch*.

## Results

Interview quotations illustrate these themes. We translated the quotations used throughout the results section ourselves.

### *Embeddedness in everyday life*

The two cultural contexts differed in terms of how embedded gambling was in everyday life, resulting in a differing interpretation of convenience gambling. The French interviewees defined convenience gambling as being in opposition to casino gambling. The casino was considered the norm as a gambling space and was seen as absorbing, even crooked, which possibly increased the attractiveness of convenience gambling as a better choice. Convenience gambling choices such as scratch cards were, therefore, described as safer in comparison, as they did not break the link to everyday experiences.

Interviewee (female): I think you have to make a big distinction between casino games and scratch games where you are in your everyday life. [In casinos] people are away from their everyday life, you put them in a place where they leave the ordinary, and then there are addictions. (Group 13F)

However, the French participants were critical of the relatively relaxed regulations of convenience locations in comparison to casinos, where you can at least obtain self-exclusion. The Finnish interviewees, on the other hand, displayed strong trust in the regulation of convenience gambling locations and casinos alike.

Interviewee (male): Concerning this, how would the situation change if we were somewhere without a state monopoly; anyone could open up a gambling place. (Group 5FIN)

The Finnish participants expressed little criticism towards the organisation of the gambling monopoly itself. Availability was raised as a potentially problematic issue, but in contrast to the French interviewees, they also discussed this as a protective factor. Compared to the kind of gambling shown in the film-clip stimuli originating from the US, gambling in Finland was considered an ordinary activity, which also made it appear safer.

The embeddedness of gambling in everyday life in Finland was further accentuated in how convenience gambling was defined in Finnish discourses. Unlike in France, convenience gambling did not contrast with casino gambling, but the normative form of gambling EGMs in Finnish convenience locations played a role in daily routines and in mediating social interactions between people. These contacts could have either a positive or a negative impact.

Interviewee 1 (female): Soc . . . social interaction, of course. [nods]

Interviewee 2 (female): -interaction, yes.

Interviewee 3 (male): Well, in my experience, at least with the gambling machines, yes, precisely, there is social interaction; but [...] there the really antisocial side of humans comes to light; because, people compete, using their elbows to get to the machine . . . and everything, it's really extreme [laughs]. (Group 9FIN)

In Finnish convenience gambling situations, EGMs play a role in the interaction between gamblers' groceries and leftover coins (see also Kinnunen, Alha, & Paavilainen, 2016). The importance of this interaction is probably also why some of the Finnish respondents were concerned about being able to play EGMs using credit or bank cards. In contrast, the low price of scratch cards in French convenience gambling locations was not seen as a factor that might reduce gambling participation. It was associated less with monetary loss and more with temporal loss.

Interviewee (male): But as you don't have to be that rich to play, because nowadays the system in France is that gambling is available to all budgets, from one Euro to 1000 Euros. You can play for even two hours with one Euro. (Group 12F)

### *Types of convenience locations*

Just as they did not distinguish convenience locations from casinos, the Finnish participants did not distinguish between different convenience locations such as gambling arcades, gas stations or supermarkets.

Interviewee 3 (male): I gamble at gambling machines, automatic machines, in shops and elsewhere; and then also in these RAY [acronym for the EGM monopoly] gambling arcades. A little bit less at the moment, but sometimes too much.

Interviewee 4 (male): I also gamble, most of the time in shops and the RAY arcades; well nearly always there. (Group 14FIN)

The French informants, on the other hand, distinguished between different convenience gambling locations, such as tobacco shops and PMU bars. The high proportion of smokers in France (According to the recent Eurobarometer, 36% of the French population are smokers, the European average being 24%, see European Commission, 2017) means that tobacco shops are widely frequented. However, as these shops also sell other products such as postal and fiscal stamps, they also attract other types of customers. The French interviewees also pointed out that tobacco shops are not very alluring places. As such, tobacco shops as convenience gambling locations in France hold a similar position to Finnish supermarkets and gas-stations.<sup>2</sup> In contrast, French PMU bars are not as numerous as smaller tobacco shops or other FDJ (La Française des jeux) outlets, but they offer more absorbing games and provide a more engaging environment.

Interviewee (male): You can play sometimes, occasionally. I think there are a lot of people who only play occasionally. The real addicts you see



in PMU bars, in casinos. The real addicts are there. (Group 12F)

The physical outline of the PMU bars serves as an intermediary between gamblers. PMU bars allow gamblers to sit and chat with each other. Alcohol and snacks are available, as well as screens to watch the sports events on which customers can bet. The TV screen has a different role to that of EGMs in Finnish convenience locations, working more as a facilitator of positive social interaction between the gamblers than of negative encounters. According to our informants, the social effect of being in the bar together may encourage further gambling:

Interviewee (male): There's a group effect, it's more difficult to stop than when you're alone. For example, me, when I go to bet on sports with 10 or 20 Euros and when I lose, I hear my friends say: "Play again, you've lost one match out of 20, you've won 19, it's a good average". So you play again, and again, and you finish without a penny. Alone you can set limits, but not when you are with people. (Group 1F)

The gambling venue (special or everyday convenience gambling) thus appears to be an important factor in the French gambling culture, and defines who plays there. The venue holds a different position to that in Finland, where convenience gambling is integrated into the daily routines of most players, regardless of their social background.

### *Acceptability of the gambling rausch*

The third dimension that was apparent in the interview material was the extent and acceptability of the gambling rausch. In France, unacceptable forms of gambling rausch were connected to customers of PMU bars, particularly if they were already in precarious situations or had a lower socio-economic status. Some of our informants considered this problematic:

Interviewee (male): It's often people who do nothing, they have time. In all the games, it's people who have time to play. If you work, you don't have the time. (Group 12F)

In the Finnish interviews, a similarly negative status was attributed to pensioners, who were consistently described as engaging in unacceptable forms of gambling.

Interviewee (female): Yes, this is right. In fact, I'm a guard in a shop, and yes you realize, these 15-year old boys [during the time of the interview, the legal gambling age was 15 years and older] are not as much of a problem as pensioners. When they gamble there, well ... (Group 1FIN)

No statistics support either of these assertions. The elderly are not the most active gamblers in Finland, nor those with the most gambling problems (Salonen & Raisamo, 2015), and the unemployed are not the most active gamblers in France (Costes, Eroukmanoff, Richard, & Tovar, 2015). Instead, these claims are based on cultural positions. Our findings show that this contradiction results from the role assigned to money and to acceptable occasions for gambling. Money (cf. Karekallas, 2018; Kinnunen et al., 2016) is not a neutral measure of value: it is loaded with meanings that establish relations between people; money creates and is part of social networks (e.g., Carruthers, 2010; Zelizer & Rotman, 2011). Indeed, money was discussed differently in the two cultural contexts. The French participants emphasised the use of the money won (cf. Majamäki & Pöysti, 2012) whereas the Finnish interviewees discussed the origin of the money. An acceptable form of money in everyday gambling situations in Finland is mainly extra change from groceries or other small amounts of money not otherwise specified. The money used by pensioners, according to the Finnish participants, did not consist of only these acceptable sources but also of their pensions. A pension might be seen as a social benefit or allowance, which binds it to the working population. Following this logic,

gambling with one's pension is considered gambling with other people's money. Although not expressly voiced in the French interviews, gambling with social benefits was similarly frowned upon in the gambling of unemployed people. Old age itself is therefore not the reason why pensioners were considered problematic gamblers, but the source of money.

In both country contexts, gambling *rausch* was also only considered acceptable under "correct" conditions, such as weekend trips, holidays and ferry cruises. These occasions obviously refer to casino gambling, and as such go beyond the scope of this article. Nevertheless, these findings highlight the importance of money and occasion as factors deciding the extent to which the gambling *rausch* was acceptable or unacceptable.

## Discussion

In this article, we have compared Finnish and French recreational gamblers' discourses regarding convenience gambling in order to identify cultural images connected with special and everyday convenience locations. We have used literature on drinking cultures as our conceptual tool and adjusted it to the specificities of gambling. The three main themes – embeddedness, types of convenience gambling and gambling *rausch* – suggest that French gambling might be oriented towards what is sometimes called in alcohol research (see Room & Mäkelä, 2000) a "dry" culture, whereas Finnish gambling is more in line with the "wet" model.

The field of alcohol studies has shown that these different cultural dimensions and positions also entail different kinds of harm. Wet consumption cultures are not as harmless as they were once believed to be (see Room & Mäkelä, 2000), but the kinds of harm most prominent in dry drinking cultures (social disturbance and violence) and wet drinking cultures (liver cirrhosis) are still a valid finding (Jellinek, 1960; Room & Mäkelä, 2000). Such a perspective has yet to be established in the

gambling field, but we hope that this study takes the first step in this direction.

Finnish respondents discussed their gambling culture as being embedded in their everyday lives and as a harmless pastime if participation was small scale and the stakes consisted of non-budgeted money. The distinction between everyday and special convenience locations did not seem to exist among the Finnish respondents. The French informants strongly connected gambling to casino environments and were suspicious of the easy availability and cheapness of convenience gambling. Unlike the Finnish participants, the French interviewees also differentiated between special and everyday spaces of convenience gambling. Gambling *rausch* was not considered acceptable in everyday gambling situations in either context, and it was viewed as particularly negative for groups who were considered to gamble away particular types of money. Admittedly, the concept of gambling *rausch* does not indicate the degree of immersion and thus some information might have been lost. It might be more applicable for looking at destination gambling with a clearer time-out character. Nevertheless, it enabled us to capture this dimension consistently in different cultural and legislative contexts. The concept of zone (e.g., Schüll, 2012; Woolley & Livingstone, 2010), for example, would be less useful in the types of convenience gambling typical of France, as it was designed for understanding immersed gambling at EGMs in particular, and there are no EGMs in French convenience gambling locations.

The kind of games available in convenience locations also seem to impact gambler experiences. EGMs were considered the most immersive type of gambling in both country contexts, even in everyday locations. In France, EGMs are not offered in any convenience location, making the French special convenience locations that only offer lotteries and betting less captivating. The only type of convenience gambling that the interviewed French players considered at all close to EGMs was the *Rapido* (Amigo) instant lottery, which previous

research literature has also described as a French alternative to convenience EGM gambling (e.g., Costes & Eroukmanoff, 2016).

The results show that the kind of convenience gambling opportunities that are available within a particular jurisdiction influences the interaction between the game and the gambler. Regulations on convenience gambling should therefore consider convenience gambling locations not only from the perspective of geographical availability, but also from the perspective of the kinds of cultural attitudes towards gambling that they promote. Social or cultural availability is a matter of access, but it also exerts an influence after the gambler has entered the gambling venue. Although structural characteristics interact with the gambler and the setting, they are also mediated by the cultural context.

Further studies should focus more on the different types of structural and situational characteristics of convenience gambling and their interaction with cultural contexts. The existing legislation and regulations are as much an outcome of gambling cultures as gambling cultures are a product of gambling regulations, and are connected to deeper cultural structures independent of gambling (e.g., Sulkunen, 2013). Our finding that the French respondents identified class-specific gambling spaces and games, whereas Finnish gambling locations were viewed as egalitarian, is probably also influenced by the more stratified French society. Factors that are external to gambling interact with the practice and thus need to be considered in regulatory processes. For this reason, comparative studies are particularly needed. The dimensions of gambling cultures (how embedded gambling is in everyday life and the extent of gambling *rausch*) presented in this article offer an initial path to conducting such studies. Although the current study was exploratory and only considered two cultural contexts, the results nevertheless show that game and venue characteristics may interact with both each other and the cultural context at different levels and in unexpected ways. The

new dimension to the interaction between venue and game which is emerging as a result of the increase of online gambling on computers and phones could not have been the topic of this study due to the timing of the sample. Studying these processes and combinations is imperative if we are to find the best possible solutions and provide more sustainable convenience gambling opportunities from a consumer protection perspective.

## Conclusions

The results of this study have particular policy relevance in Finland, where recent proposals for policy reform have suggested removing EGMs from everyday locations and confining them to arcades, which represent special convenience gambling. While this may diminish problems through reduced accessibility, the policy may also have the unintended consequence of polarising gambling problems, particularly if convenience gambling continues to be characterised by EGM rather than less intense gambling opportunities. It is also a matter of concern that some of these special convenience locations, namely the *Feel Vegas Clubs*, serve alcohol to players. Although further studies on the topic are recommended, the analysis conducted in this article has shown that everyday and special convenience gambling opportunities may be experienced either differently or similarly, depending on the cultural context. In Finland, this experience appears to be one of normalisation and embeddedness in everyday life regardless of venue type. This suggests that overall reductions in availability might be a better policy objective.

## Declaration of conflicting interests


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## Notes

1. What happens in the scene and who are the persons in the film? What happened before this event? What happens immediately after it? How does the same person appear ten years later? Can something like this happen in real life? Should someone do something about the issue shown in the film?
2. In Finland with many areas of low population density, gas stations are often the social and commercial hub of the municipality.

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